

Appetite for Ottawa

by *Mike Cohen*

I received such a warm response from readers who were pleased with previous articles on Ottawa restaurants. Just over two hours away from Montreal, the nation's capital has grown in popularity among many of us.

Zak's Diner

Mark down Zak's Diner as simply a fun place to eat when in Ottawa, with locations at Byward Market, Elgin Street, Carleton Place and Kanata.

The Byward location is open 24/7 and offers all-day breakfast, unbeatable burgers, sandwiches, world famous milkshakes and much more. Zak's is noted for its burgers, so the Zak Attack looked like a good option: Two patties with bacon, swiss cheddar cheese and thousand islands dressing. All burger meals are served with coleslaw, a pickle and either fries, curly fries, soup, salad or onion rings. I had both the curly

fries, along with garlic mayo for dipping, and a piping hot bowl of tomato bisque soup. And no, I could not finish everything on my plate. I was delighted to learn that they have a lactose-free milkshake option, so I went for the banana chocolate flavour with a nice serving of whipped cream and a cherry on top. In fact, you get the equivalent of a full second serving as well so there is plenty to share.

The Byward Market location is wheelchair accessible. Call ahead of time and they will make a ramp available for indoor dining. The patio is at street level. Washrooms via Zak's Cantina next door are also accessible.

Info: www.zaksdiner.com.



Iconic Al's

Located on Elgin Street, Al's Steakhouse was established in 1967 by the late Halim "Al" Saikali. The restaurant seats 130 inside, 80 in a private banquet room and 80 on the beautiful seasonal outdoor patio.

We began with some drinks. The menu has a wide array of appetizers. I started off with a piping hot bowl of chicken noodle soup. Some freshly baked rolls, with soft butter, arrived at the table. Then the sharing began: Escargots au Gratin, with in-house garlic butter; a dozen outstanding P.E.I. oysters with different sauces; a burrata salad for two, including heirloom tomatoes, extra virgin olive oil, house balsamic, fresh basil, Maldon

sea salt and crispy pieces of French bread; and tuna tartare, served with avocado, pickled radish, Asian dressing and crispy wontons. The ladies shared a 14-inch rib steak, cooked to perfection and already sliced, with a side of mashed potatoes. I chose the 12-ounce New York strip, which was to die for. On the side I ordered some garlic rice. And yes, we saved just enough room for some of their homemade desserts. We shared the lemon tart and the coconut cream pie.

The rear entrance from the parking lot is fully wheelchair accessible, as are the seasonal patio and the washrooms. Curbside pickup is also available.

Info: www.alssteakhouse.com.



Métropolitain Brasserie

Conveniently located next to the Byward Market at 700 Sussex, just steps away from Parliament Hill, Métropolitain Brasserie is home to Ottawa's largest raw bar. Open seven days a week, serving lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends, we had a wonderful summer Saturday evening dinner on their spacious patio.



We started off the evening with some drinks and then took a good hard look at all of the options available among the appetizers. Some breads, rolls and butter and an order of outstanding mushroom Flatbread, with spinach, ricotta, Gruyère and truffle oil, started things off. Then came one of our favorites: a seafood platter for two (which was more than enough for three): shrimp, oysters, mus-

sels, snow crab, cod croquettes and scallop crudo. This could have been a meal itself. I savoured every morsel. There is a larger platter for four available.

There is a nice selection of main courses. The Duck Confit caught my eye, an item I do not see available at too many restaurants I frequent. It was superbly prepared, with crispy skin and served with warm fingerling salad, roasted peppers, grilled onions, black olives, fresh basil, apricot harissa toss and lime crema. As for the others, they opted for the steak frites petit (five ounces), heart of Angus ribeye and maître d' hotel butter and Coquille St. Jacques, with seared scallops, mashed potatoes, wilted spinach, Mornay sauce, melted Gruyère and toasted Panko bread crumbs.

While we were quite full, it was pretty hard to resist the dessert menu. We agreed to share the flourless chocolate cake, with caramel sauce and raspberry preserves. It literally melted in my mouth.

The seasonal patio and main entrance are wheelchair accessible, as are the washrooms. There is plenty of street parking and paid lots close by. If you park in the indoor lot next door and remain at the first level, you can gain direct entrance to the restaurant.

Info: www.metropolitainbrasserie.com.